

WHERE ARE WE HEADING?

1. Currently, Free World Military Forces (FWMF: US, ROK, Australian) and certain ARVN units are conducting some offensive operations against NVA/VC regular units. Both sides ~~are~~ in this campaign are now increasing in strength: the GVN side by increasing US and ROK divisions, the VC by continued infiltration and stepped-up recruiting and upgrading of units~~x~~ (so far outweighing combat losses and defections). The evolution of this conflict will depend heavily on whether the VC: a) continue accepting combat at high rates of attrition ~~but~~ and continue to maintain or increase main force size by infiltration and recruitment; or (b) withdraw from large-scale operations, removing some units to Cambodia, Laos, NVN and remote areas in SVN and dispersing other units into guerrilla bands. (see below). (A third alternative--stopping infiltration but accepting combat, allowing ~~xxxxxxx~~ destruction by physical attrition--seems unlikely).

2. Meanwhile, neither RVNAF (ARVN/RF/PF) nor FWMF are conducting effective counter-guerrilla operations against local guerrillas. So long as this continues, the Communists will maintain their effective control of half the population in the country and most of the rural area: their ability to maintain their strength by taxing and drafting, to obstruct government programs and administration, deny information to the government and assure it for themselves.

3. Increasing FWMF presence is producing--and even more, is being blamed for--inflation that is impoverishing parts of the population with fixed incomes (e.g., civil servants and police). FWMF operations are spreading and intensifying the risks of war to civilians in the countryside and killing many civilians. ~~Especially if xxxxxxxx the presence xxxxxxxx operations xxx of FWMF xxxxxxxx accompanied by xxx tangible xxx progress~~ Yet these costs of FWMF presence and operations ~~may~~^{will} not be accompanied--in the absence of effective anti-guerrilla/political-apparatus campaigns by regional ~~forces~~ and local forces and police--by visible, tangible progress in providing security and reducing VC control in the countryside. This lack of visible reward (for which statistics on dead VC ~~main~~ regular troopers provide little substitute) ~~is~~ is likely to produce cynicism and great pessimism about the worth of the FWMF contribution and the course of the war, and decreasing tolerance of the burdens of the war and the presence of FWMF. Growing anti-American sentiment--including contempt and resentment for their failure to ~~freexxxxxxx countryside from~~ protect villagers from Communist terrorism and control--will eventually tempt political dissidents as a means to power.

4. The VC may be losing popular appeal: because of increased taxes and draft, more ruthless behavior. But so long as the people are not protected from their coercion, this change in attitudes may not mean much change in behavior. Moreover, the GVN itself may be becoming less acceptable: thanks to corruption, inflation, anti-Americanism, increased pressures of war (bombing, artillery), draft, and failure to improve security.

5. If the Communists choose to withdraw from big-unit confrontation, we will be left with the guerrilla war and VC control of the population by terrorism and their political apparatus. The suppression of large-scale conflict ~~could~~^{could} be claimed as a "limited victory" (perhaps achievable by mid-1968, prior to elections) and a basis for some withdrawal of US forces. But the political/military situation would be no better than late-1963; and no preparations are currently underway--reorganizing, retraining, motivating, and improving the leadership of ARVN/RF/PF--to ensure better performance by GVN forces in 1967-68 than in 1963, when their performance was not good enough to prevent expanding control by the VC.

It might be that with the threat of large-scale units lifted from ~~province~~ sector commanders and battalion/regimental/division commanders, they would use their troops more aggressively and more flexibly to hunt the guerrillas and protect the population, than they have done in recent years. Or, US troops might be used, in small units, for anti-guerrilla operations: though successful operations would require close coordination with Vietnamese ~~intelligence~~ intelligence, including police intelligence. Moreover, ~~the~~ US operations would be handicapped--if RVNAF were not also operating with ~~renewed~~ effectiveness--by lack of ~~confidence~~ public confidence that they would stay in the area and in the country long enough to do a thorough job against the insurgents and their political structure, let alone to provide lasting protection.

6. It is not only RVNAF that is not ready and is not being prepared to wage effective counterguerrilla war. The National Police remain underpaid and undermotivated, inadequately trained (though 12 weeks training--if carried out--will be a great improvement over 5-6 weeks training), and associated in the public mind with timidity and corruption rather than with protection of the public. There are no emergency laws and procedures to permit the arrest and detention of large numbers of suspected or known VC political agents, or jails ~~to~~ or detention centers to house them, or plans and personnel to interrogate them or change their allegiance. ~~These~~ These lacks leave the notion of "destroying the enemy infrastructure" without clear content: except to the extent that paramilitary representatives of the GVN engage in the ~~large~~ murder of unarmed suspects.))

7. If, on the other hand, the Communists choose to ~~prexxxxx~~
~~xxxxxlaxgxxxxx~~ accept large-scale combat, ~~xxxxxxxdisengaging~~
~~xxxxxturn~~ replacing combat losses with continued or increased
infiltration and ~~xxxxxx~~ drafting, US forces of currently planned
size might face stalemate, with high loss rates on both sides.
Presumably the Communists would hope that high US losses would
quickly discourage US public opinion and lead to a "sell-out."
The US would indeed be under strong pressure to break out of this
stalemate: aside from prompt negotiated settlement (if the VC were
using this tactic, they would presumably demand very stiff terms),
the alternatives would be: (a) still higher commitment of US/FWMP
forces to SVN, perhaps a million men or more; (b) New programs to
increase the effectiveness of ARVN against Communist regulars,
e.g., KATUSA-type integration of US and ARVN units, more use of
US leadership at various levels; (b) expansion and intensification
of the air campaign against NVN, including targets such as harbors,
oil, industry, all air defenses; (c) commitment of US/FWMP units
to anti-infiltration deployment in Laos: ~~xxx~~ roughly along the
17th Parallel to Thailand; d) interdiction and pursuit air attacks
~~xxxx~~ inside the borders of Cambodia; e) Commitment of US troops
to action in North Vietnam: to stop infiltration, and ultimately
to change the regime of NVN.

Thus, this Communist strategy would involve grave risks for
them: alternatives (b) and (e) above. However, (b) by itself ~~xxx~~
~~xxxxxxxixxxkxxxxxNVN~~ would not physically prevent further
reinforcement of the VC, and could probably be ~~xxxxxxkxxxx~~
terminated by NVN willingness to "negotiate" (without in the end
making significant concessions. Continued reinforcement--amounting
to invasion--would challenge US decision-makers to end it forcefully
by ~~xxxxxx~~ ground action in Laos and/or NVN; yet the latter move
into NVN, and the probable raising of objectives to a change in
the NVN regime, might well bring in Chicom ground/air intervention,
and lead to at least a limited air war against Communist China:
perhaps by early '68 or even mid-'67.

None of this would directly reduce the VC guerrilla/political
grip on the countryside of SVN; although preoccupation by Hanoi's
leadership with a war inside NVN might dry up direction and support
of the SVN campaign. (Continued guerrilla operations within both
North and South Vietnam seem more likely).

Alternative (c) would involve abandoning the Geneva ~~xxx~~ Accords
(the Chicoms, ~~xxx~~ might respond in the Laos arena), would be of
controversial effectiveness and might not appear an economical use
of force in these circumstances; alternative (d) would violate
Cambodia's sovereignty and might be of limited effectiveness (though
it still might be worthwhile).

Thus along with its risks, this Communist strategy makes the
alternatives to even an unfavorable settlement look very unpleasant
to the US: costly, long-drawn-out, uncertain and risky.